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## DOCTOR JAMES D. ROBINSON.

By Dr. J. F. Snyder.

One day in the early spring of 1840 the daily fourhorse stage coach, carrying the mail on the route from St. Louis to Vincennes, drew up, as usual, at the hotel on the public square in Belleville, Ill.; and of the several passengers who alighted from it, one was a young man, a total stranger, who seemed glad that he had reached his journey's end. On the hotel register he wrote, in a free, business-like hand, "Charles Mount, New York City," as his name and address. Telling Jake Knoebel, the landlord, that he would probably remain there some time, he asked for a comfortable room, well lighted and heated, and not higher up than the second floor, which was assigned to him, and into it his capacious trunk and other baggage were soon snugly stowed. Having the evident faculty for accommodating himself to his environments, he seemed at once to feel quite at home in his new quarters, and very favorably disposed to the town and its people. He was not bothered with excessive diffidence or bashfulness; neither was he morose, exclusive, or tongue-tied; but, being what is now known as a "good mixer," it was not long before he was on the best of terms with the most prominent men of the place.

Concerning himself, he told his newly-found acquaintances that he was born and raised in a town (which he was careful not to name) in western Massachusetts; and having recently graduated at Yale College—a fact verified by the diploma he exhibited from that institution—he had concluded to gratify a keen desire, long entertained, to visit the great West, of which he had heard and read so much, before selecting a profession or settling down in any permanent business occupation. He was, therefore, here merely to see the country. Apparently well supplied with money, he paid cash for all that he bought or received, was liberal in his expenditures, but not profligate or extravagant.

Charley Mount, then 23 years old, was, in every respect, a remarkably prepossessing young man. He was 5 feet, 7 inches in height, perfectly proportioned, weighing perhaps 140 pounds, and his black, wavy hair surmounted a handsome beardless face to which the sparkling, dark eyes gave an expression of intelligent animation. hands and feet were small and well-shaped—a feminine feature that gave rise, in certain quarters, to the suspicion that he was a girl masquerading in male attire. That notion was strengthened by his exceptional habits abstaining totally from the use of liquor, tobacco, and vulgar or profane language. He was a Chesterfield in manners and deportment, affable and friendly in disposition and refined and cultured in conversation. His clothes, of fine texture, fitted perfectly, and he was invariably neat and clean; yet there was about him no affectation of the fop or dandy, but the easy bearing of the well-bred gentleman.

Among the guests of the Belleville House at the time Charley Mount arrived there, was an Irish lawyer, a generous, big-hearted bachelor 30 years of age, who had recently changed his place of residence from Kaskaskia to become a member of the Belleville bar. His name was James Shields—the same who in later years was a general in two wars, and had the unique distinction of representing three different states in the United States Senate. Notwithstanding the disparity of seven years in their ages, and also some disparity in their personal habits, a mutual attraction at once drew the lawyer and the young stranger together in bonds of warm friendship. In a brief space of time they both enjoyed immense popularity, particularly in the younger stratum of Belleville

society; were much admired by the young ladies, and became conspicuous figures in all their dancing parties and other social gatherings.

In the northwest corner of the public square was a small two-room brick house—one room behind the other built there in 1835 by Adam W. Snyder for a law office; and after him it continued for many years to serve that purpose for several other lawyers who gained high prominence in the legal and political annals of the state. Col. Snyder, in failing health, had retired from the practice of law, but still retained that building as his political headquarters, passing some time there daily when the weather permitted. When abandoning the active work of his profession, he installed there Gustavus Koerner (his late partner) and James Shields, who had entered into partnership, as his successors. And that law office was the haunt where Charley Mount whiled away many of his leisure hours, though he frequently visited the offices of the other town lawyers, and also of the doctors. When he came to Belleville the memorable "coonskin and hard cider" political campaign had commenced and was rapidly gaining momentum in popular interest and excitement. On the 4th of December, 1839, the national Whig convention at Harrisburg, Pa., had chosen Wm. Henry Harrison as the candidate of that party for the presidency, and John Tyler for vice president. Martin Van Buren, then president, was the candidate of the Democrats, though not until the 5th of May, 1840, was he unanimously nominated to succeed himself by his party's convention at Baltimore. State and all local issues were ignored, and the fierce contest was waged altogether on national and personal questions.

Since 1834 the population of St. Clair county had annually gained large accessions from the incoming German immigration. And all of that "element" who acquired the right of suffrage in six months' time or less, guided by Koerner and Snyder, voted the Democratic ticket as

a unit. Hence, St. Clair county was one of the most important Democratic strongholds in the State, and one the Whigs especially desired to overcome. As the campaign progressed the enthusiasm of both parties became a wild frenzy. The Whigs particularly, who had never yet elected a president, and who had at the last general election run the Democrats so closely in Illinois, brought every agency to bear that ingenuity could suggest and money provide to carry this State. In Belleville, as everywhere else throughout the country, their almost continuous succession of the most extravagant pageants, parades and mass meetings kept up the turmoil at fever heat for months, answered, in some measure, with as noisy and absurd demonstrations by the Democrats.

In the Whig parades the predominant emblems, intended to represent the pioneer life and career of their candidate, Gen. Harrison, were canoes, yawls, skiffs, scows and log cabins, mounted on wheels, embellished with coon and deer skins—live coons, also, in many instances—barrels of hard cider, gourds, camping outfits, and profusion of flags and banners. Fortunately the torchlight accompaniment had not been invented. Brass bands were scarce, and in their stead fifes, drums, fiddles, with an occasional French horn, or trumpet, provided the music. Campaign songs, in every key and note, in all places and at all times, fretted the air and made life a prolonged misery. As a sample, a favorite ode of the Whigs commenced thus:

"We do not wish Van Buren dead, Nor wish he had a broken head; But if he once were dead and gone We should not wish him to return.

In Abraham's bosom may he lie, And over hell may Abraham fly; Then open wide his roundabout And let Van Buren tumble out."

The Democrats retaliated with melodies reciting how Tecumseh was killed by Col. Dick Johnson, of Kentucky, a Democrat; and how Gen. Harrison hid under a big soap kettle during the battle of Tippecanoe. At Belleville, all through the months of June and July, mass meetings, now called "rallies," were held by both parties, with all sensational accompaniments, every few days. The few daily newspapers then published had not learned the knack, possessed by the press of today, of reporting speeches in full, thereby dispensing political knowledge and wisdom to the people. Consequently, the people depended for knowledge of public affairs upon the party orators, which insured to every advertised speaker a satisfactory and attentive audience. Both parties called to their aid their best local debators and such of wider fame that could be secured. The rostrums of the Democrats were supplied by Governor Reynolds, candidate for Congress; Col. Snyder, candidate for the State Senate and presidential elector; Lyman Trumbull, candidate for the Legislature; Koerner, Shields and other local lawyers, with occasional addition of Dr. Bissell of Monroe county, candidate there for the Legislature; Judge Breese, Sam McRoberts, John Wentworth, Stephen A. Douglas, Senator Thos. H. Benton of Missouri, and other "foreign" party leaders of more or less note.

Bob Smith, of Alton, came down one day and addressed the Belleville multitude. He had twice represented Madison county in the Legislature, was a rattling, strong stump orator, and had Congressional aspirations, justly claiming that as St. Clair county had had the Congressman of that (the First) district continuously since Joe Duncan's last term, it would be no more than fair to let Madison, the next strongest Democratic county in the district, have it a while. His speech was boisterously applauded by the large concourse of people who listened to him.

While Smith was making "the boys" cheer and yell, Gov. Reynolds stood on the outskirts of the crowd in scowling mood, "viewing with alarm" Bob's rising popularity, apprehensive that it would seal his official doomas it did; for the first Democratic Congressional convention held in that district, in 1842, nominated Bob Smith for the next term and thereby relegated the Old Ranger to private life. While the governor was standing there listening, with illy-disguised disgust, to Smith, a teacher of the county schools, named Tam—a loud-talking, brazen fellow, who in conversation made use of the biggest words in the dictionary, generally inappropriately, and who had ambition to run for office—approached him and said: "Governor, I would like mighty well to discourse to these people on the magnitudinous questions of the day. you think if I announced an appointment to speak here on a specific date they would come to hear me?" "Of course they would," answered Reynolds, "they would turn out to a man; for, as a rule, the d—der the fool to listen to the bigger the crowd." Mr. Tam didn't speak, but after the election moved to Arkansas where he later attained considerable prominence.

The Belleville Whigs also enlisted a strong contingent of speakers to advocate their cause and give aid and comfort to their local candidates. Among the most able and effective of them were A. P. Field, then Secretary of State; E. D. Baker, Cyrus Edwards, Ex-Gov. Duncan, U. F. Linder, John J. Hardin, John Hogan, Jos. Gillespie, and last, but not the least, Abraham Lincoln, a candidate for the Legislature in Sangamon county. Even then Lincoln was known as the "Rail Splitter," and he certainly looked it. Gov. Koerner, writing of that period, says: "In point of melody of voice and graceful delivery, though not in argument, most all the other speakers surpassed him. It was the first time I saw Mr. Lincoln. It must be said that his appearance was not very prepossessing. His exceedingly tall and very angular form

made his movements rather awkward. Nor were his features, when he was not animated, pleasant, owing principally to his high cheek bones. His complexion had no roseate hue of health, but was then rather bilious, and, when not speaking, his face seemed to be overshadowed with melancholy thoughts, I observed him closely, thought I saw a good deal of intellect in him, while his looks were genial and kind. I did not believe, however, that he had much reserve will power. No one in the crowd would have dreamed that he was one day to be their President, and finally lead his people through the greatest crisis it had seen since the Revolutionary war."

When the exercises were over on the day Mr. Lincoln spoke, he and Joseph Gillespie boldly invaded the enemy's camp. That is, they called on Col. Snyder at his home. Lincoln and Snyder were together as captains in the Black Hawk war, and Judge Gillespie was a private in Captain Snyder's company. Their visit was exceedingly pleasant to all. After a little jocular allusion to the existing political situation, their conversation was altogether reminiscent, and in the spirit of cordial familiar friendship.

Charley Mount had perhaps never given the subject of politics a serious thought before coming to Illinois. Influenced by his associates here, however, he was soon a rampant "Locofoco," as the Whigs, in derision, termed the Democrats. He was not a speaker, but accompanied Shields, Koerner, and others, on their precinct appointments, applauded them vociferously, joined in singing the campaign songs and wrote flaming reports of their meetings to the party newspapers.

At the election only six states cast their electoral votes for Van Buren, one of which was Illinois. Harrison and Tyler were elected, but it proved to be a barren victory. In this State the Democrats made almost a clean sweep,

\*Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1890. Vol. I, pp. 443-444. Pub. Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1909.

securing two of the three Congressmen and both houses of the Legislature; but the Whigs elected Gillespie in Madison, and Lincoln in Sangamon, to the Legislature, and John T. Stuart to Congress in the third district.

In the intervals of political engagements at Belleville, both Charley Mount and Shields found time to fall in love with their landlord's charming daughter. the most sentimental of the two, raved about her, styling her "angelic," etc., and wrote verses about her, which she probably never saw. Mr. Knoebel, a very quiet man of few words, but much strong, practical common sense, would, of course, never have permitted his daughter to marry either of them, regarding them as mere adventurers having no fixed place of abode or visible property assets. The girl seems to have shared her father's views in that matter, and abruptly ended their romance by marrying Mr. Neuhoff, a wealthy German a few years older than herself, and not quite the Adonis in personal graces that Charley Mount was, but one of Belleville's most enterprising and substantial citizens.

The newly elected Twelfth General Assembly, largely Democratic in both houses, early in the session elected James Shields to the position of State Auditor. to Springfield to enter upon the duties of his office, he took Charley Mount along and installed him as his chief clerk. In a social point of view Belleville's loss in that move was the State capital's gain. In the second year of the new auditor's incumbency, 1842, occurred the famous Shields-Lincoln embroilment wherein the former challenged the latter to mortal combat. Shields selected John D. Whiteside, late State Treasurer, for his second, because of that gentleman's political prominence and the martial prestige of his name. But Charley Mount pluckily stood by him in that fearful ordeal, stating afterwards that he had determined to avenge the death of his Hibernian friend in case he fell, perforated by the broad sword of the future immortal Emancipator. Fortunately

for the nation the ludicrous affair was adjusted without bloodshed, and shortly thereafter Charley Mount abruptly resigned his clerkship and returned to the East.

Nothing more was heard of him until early in 1847, the second year of the Mexican war, when he again suddenly appeared in Belleville, the same jovial, genial fellow, only looking more manly and mature, his handsome face adorned with an elegant black mustache. had undergone a strange transformation. He was no longer Charles Mount, but Dr. James D. Robinson, the name he inscribed on the hotel register. In explanation of that surprising metamorphosis he said an old bachelor uncle, named James D. Robinson, who many years before had migrated from Scotland to New England, and there accumulated a large fortune, learning of his (Charley's) purposeless stay in the West, wrote to him to return to his eastern home and study for a profession. promising, if he would do so, to defray all his expenses; and further proposed if he would legally assume his name -James D. Robinson-he would constitute him his heir. He said he gladly accepted that offer, immediately went back to his home, had his name changed by the court, chose the medical profession, and his uncle liberally supplied him with funds until his graduation at the best medical college in New York. But unfortunately about that time the old gentleman suddenly died without having executed a last will and testament, and the law distributed his wealth among his nearest of kin; and he, Dr. Jas. D. Robinson, the heir presumptive, was left to continue the inevitable struggle.

After a brief visit he returned to the East. He had come, it was learned, to secure the recommendations of influential friends in Illinois in support of his application for a federal appointment in the medical staff of the volunteer army. In that he was successful, receiving from President Polk the position of assistant surgeon of Col. E. W. B. Newby's regiment, mustered into the service, at

Alton, June 8, 1847. In that regiment was a company from Belleville, of which Wash Hook was captain, Wm. H. Snyder first lieutenant and regimental adjutant, and Enoch Luckey second lieutenant, with all of whom the doctor was previously well acquainted; and he shared with them the hardships and glory (?) of their campaign in New Mexico and the Navajo country. He was highly esteemed by all the command, proving to be a skillful surgeon and able physician, invariably attentive, kind and sympathetic in the discharge of his duties. Before the regiment's term of service expired he was ordered to New York City for service in a government hospital there.

Lost then to his Illinois friends, he was no more heard of until one day in the spring of 1856 he unexpectedly again alighted from the stage coach in Belleville. those interested in his history he told that when relieved from hospital duty, after the war closed, he practiced medicine awhile in New York City. Then he had accepted the position of physician on the vessels of the Cunard line of steamships, and in that capacity, with ample salary, had crossed and recrossed the Atlantic for some years, passing his vacations in England, Scotland, and various parts of the continent. Tiring of that service. and longing for the freedom and charm of the West, he relinquished his post on the briny deep, and came to settle down permanently in Illinois. He had intended to locate in Belleville, but the profession there being then, as now, so wretchedly overcrowded, he went to Illinoistown (now East St. Louis) and established himself. From the start he was successful. Though the country was in a ferment of excitement about the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, he paid no attention to politics, devoting the little leisure he had to the pursuits of literature. In an old scrap book here is a "Carrier's New Year's Address" of the Belleville Advocate's "Printer's Devil," of Jan. 1, 1857, inserted in the paper with this comment by the editor: "New Year's Address.—The address of our

carrier is of such poetic merit that we are induced to give it to all our readers. We are indebted for it to the skillful and accomplished pen of Dr. James D. Robinson of Illinois town."

As a place for residence in those days Illinoistown was not altogether an Elysium, but a decidedly "hard" town. That fact, and his increasing acquaintance and business on the other side of the river, prompted Dr. Robinson to move over to St. Louis in the early days of 1858, and there establish his office a few blocks west of the Planters' House. Another inducement for him to change his location was his marriage, about that time, to Miss Rachael Addis, a young lady of striking beauty of form and features, said, by gossips, to be a Jewess who had renounced her faith for a career on the stage. Rumors were whispered that her reputation was not altogether unclouded, and, later, vague reports of infelicity in their domestic life were heard.

The success of Dr. Robinson was marvelous. Devoting but a few hours daily to office practice, he was a familiar figure on the streets of the city, seated in his fine buggy, driving a spirited horse, in serving a constantly widening circle of resident patrons. One day in the autumn of 1858, the doctor's equipage came down the street, and the horse, as long accustomed, stopped at his post in front of the office door. Directly some passerby noticed that the horse was not hitched to his post as usual, and the doctor, pale and motionless, retained his seat in the buggy. Closer inspection revealed the startling fact that he was dead, and, on further investigation, a small empty vial emitting the unmistakable odor of prussic acid, found on the floor of the buggy at his feet, conclusively indicated that he had deliberately committed suicide.

Early the next morning a stranger arrived in St. Louis from the East, in search of Dr. Robinson, and from him the true history of the doctor's life was learned. His name from his birth, was James D. Robinson, as was also that of his father. The rich Scotch uncle, who promised to make him his heir on condition that he would change his name, was a myth of his own creation, and never existed. In his childhood both his parents died, leaving him an orphan with but a limited patrimony. Precocious, studious, and bent on acquiring a classic education, he had exhausted all his means at the beginning of his senior year at Yale, and, it seemed, would be compelled to abandon the object of his ambition. But a wealthy maiden lady of his native village, several years older than himself, captivated by his handsome face and figure and polished manners, had fallen violently in love with him. He reciprocated her passion, or pretended to, and they were married. She gave him all the funds necessary to complete his course at the university, then installed him in luxuriant ease in her elegant home.

There could be but little harmony in a pair who differed so radically in every respect as they did. He was not wayward, ill-natured, or inclined to dissipation, but fond of adventure, amusements, gay, jovial society, and rather skeptical regarding some of the sublime truths of the sacred scriptures. She was staid and sedate in disposition, of serious, ascetic temperament, rigidly pious, and an orthodox Christian in mortal dread of sin and Nevertheless she adored him, and undertook to convert him to her puritanical notions. But the task was hopeless. Impatient of restraint, and longing to see the great west, he forged her name to a check for quite a sum of her money; then, as Charley Mount, came to Belleville. He was there, in the frontier settlements, before the introduction of railroads and telegraphs, as safe from detection as fugitive criminals were in Texas.

Clerical work in the auditor's office failed to satisfy his aspirations, as he had arrived at the age when, he thought, he should have a higher and more stable life vocation. He desired to enter the medical profession, and saw but one way to compass that end. That way he at once adopted by returning to his wife, meek and repentant, and throwing himself upon her mercy. Woman-like, she forgave the wrong he had committed, and defrayed all his expenses through a full course of study at a New York medical college. Graduated there, he commenced the practice of his new profession at his boyhood home. For a while all went well, but again his wife's strict discipline grew very irksome. He was meditating schemes for escaping from it when, fortunately, the Mexican war presented the opportunity. It was some time before he could convince his wife that patriotism and honor demanded he should obey his country's call in its hour of peril. Gaining her consent at length, he joyfully went with Col. Newby's regiment over the old Santa Fe trail.

When relieved of hospital service at New York he made a brief tour of Europe, and, returning to the New England village, resumed his professional work, which he very probably continued until 1856, when he again escaped form his connubial thraldom and came west.

The stranger from the East who came in quest of him was a civil officer and also a relative of his wife. He was provided with a requisition from the Governor of Massachusetts for the doctor's arrest and extradition: but finding him dead declined to make any explanation of the offense he had committed. It was presumably a felony, perhaps another forgery. By some means the doctor learned that a minion of the law was coming for him. Rather than be taken back to his birthplace a prisoner, and face the disgrace of prosecution for bigamy and a yet graver criminal charge, and, it may be, unhappy in his second marital relations, he sought relief in self-imposed death. The officer executed his writ by taking his prisoner's dead body back to the old Bay state and laving it in a grave in the village cemetery alongside those of his parents.